

1 INVERTER CONTROLLED, PARALLEL CONNECTED ASYNCHRONOUS GENERATOR
2 FOR DISTRIBUTED GENERATION

3
4 BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

5 The present invention relates generally to systems for providing uninterrupted power, and
6 more particularly to a distributed generation system that can condition power from the grid,
7 provide backup power in the event the grid fails, and export excess power to the grid.

8 FIELD OF THE INVENTION

9 Engine-generators and battery-backed electronic inverters are used in different ways to
10 provide backup power, condition power from the utility grid, and to produce power for export
11 to the grid. Either alone has shortcomings: battery-backed inverters alone have limited
12 energy storage and thus short durations when power fails. Synchronous-machine electrical
13 generators need to be synchronized mechanically to the grid frequency and require
14 controllable excitation for non-end connected applications: asynchronous machine generators
15 need not be accurately speed controlled to deliver power to a grid, but they require means of
16 excitation (capacity bank, battery and inverter) and mechanical slip control for non-grid
17 connected operation. Consequently, inverters and generators are often combined together, to
18 complement each other.

19 Electronic inverters, when backed by a battery, are often used in facilities as
20 uninterruptible supplies of alternating current. Typically they condition the voltage of utility
21 electrical power, and provide backup power for short durations in case of utility grid power

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1 brownouts and failures. In other words, when the grid voltage drops, the inverter provides
 2 current to bolster the line voltage. When the grid power fails, a transfer switch disconnects
 3 the grid, and the inverter alone powers the facility loads. For continuous operation over long
 4 periods of time, however, electric generators powered by external engines are required.

5 Figure 1 depicts a three-phase power system 100 where a distributed generation (DG)
 6 system 102 is used to assist or substitute for the utility grid 104. The output of the DG
 7 system 102 is connected to the loads 106 in parallel to the utility grid 104. The DG system
 8 102 may be isolated from the loads by means of an isolation transformer 108. The utility
 9 grid 104 may also be decoupled and stepped down by an isolation transformer 110. If the
 10 DG system 102 is capable of operating and sustaining the load 106 in case the utility grid 104
 11 fails, a transfer switch 112 is required to disconnect the utility grid 104 from the load 106.

12 A prior art distributed generation system 200, as shown in Figure 2, may comprise an
 13 engine 202, generator 204, rectifier 206, and a battery-backed inverter 210 combined in
 14 series. The AC power generated by the generator 204 must go through a two-step
 15 conversion. AC output from the engine driven generator 204 is rectified in a rectifier 206 to
 16 make direct current (DC), that keeps the battery 208 charged and powers an inverter 210 that
 17 makes AC output power at grid frequency, to supply loads and to export power to the grid.
 18 The AC power may be filtered by a filter 212. The AC output of the DG system 200 may be
 19 coupled to the isolation transformer 108 shown in Figure 1. The AC output can be used for
 20 (i) conditioning power from the grid, (ii) providing backup power in the event the grid fails,
 21 and (iii) exporting excess power to the grid. The disadvantage of this design is that there are

1 two power conversions, each resulting in loss and heating. Losses may be decreased through
2 use of a delta-conversion architecture that is similar, but provides a bypass path for grid
3 power that is acceptable.

4 A prior art distributed power generation system 300, as shown in Figure 3, may comprise
5 an engine 302, a synchronous-machine generator 304, and a battery-backed inverter 306
6 operated with their outputs in parallel but switched, to make a power conditioner or backup
7 supply. The AC output of the DG system 300 may be coupled to the isolation transformer
8 108 shown in Figure 1.

9 When grid power is available, the generator 304 is switched offline via a transfer switch
10 310 and the engine 302 is typically off. The inverter 306 monitors and conditions the utility
11 power to the loads. When the inverter 306 senses that the grid power has failed, it signals the
12 engine controller 314 to start the engine 302. The engine 302 start up period may exceed a
13 minute. During this transition period, the inverter 306 provides all the power to the load
14 from the battery 308. Once the generator 304 is powered up and at the right synchronous
15 speed, its output is switched in by the transfer switch 310, in place of the grid, to power the
16 load 106. The inverter 306 then eases off on its output, and conditions the generator output
17 voltage. An engine controller 314 electrically coupled to the engine 302 and the inverter 306
18 is responsible for regulating engine speed, and thus determining line frequency. The inverter
19 306 synchronizes to the generator 304 output, but it does not control or correct variations in
20 the generator output frequency. Therefore, such a DG system 300 cannot typically meet
21 utility frequency specifications to provide utility grid-connected output.

1 grid.

2 The above, and other objects, features and advantages of the present invention will be
3 apparent in the following detailed description thereof, when read in conjunction with the
4 appended drawings, wherein the same reference numerals denote the same or similar parts
5 throughout the several views.

6 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

7 Figure 1 is a block diagram showing the coupling of a distributed generation system to a
8 utility grid to provide uninterrupted power to a load.

9 Figure 2 is a block diagram of a first prior art distributed generation system useful in
10 Figure 1.

11 Figure 3 is a block diagram of a second prior art distributed generation system useful in
12 Figure 1.

13 Figure 4 is a block diagram of a first distributed generation system consistent with the
14 present invention.

15 Figure 5 is a block diagram of a second distributed generation system consistent with the
16 present invention.

17 DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

18 Figure 4 is a block diagram of a first distributed generation (DG) system 400 that is
19 capable of generating three-phase power. Distributed generation means a system divided up
20 among two or more components. The output of the DG system 400 is preferably connected
21 in parallel to a utility grid to power a load 106 as shown in Figure 1. The system 400

1 comprises an engine 402 coupled to an asynchronous generator 404, an inverter 406 coupled
 2 to an energy storage device 408 such as a battery or ultracapacitor, an engine controller 414,
 3 and an optional filter 412. The generator 404 is capable of generating a three-phase AC
 4 output. The generator AC output may be connected in parallel to the three-phase AC output
 5 of the filter 412. The system is capable of conditioning power from the grid, providing
 6 backup power in the event the grid fails, and exporting excess power to the grid. Grid failure
 7 may be a complete lack of power (blackout) or insufficient power (brownout). The present
 8 invention tightly integrates the energy storage device-backed inverter and an engine-
 9 generator, in novel manners. The engine controller 414 may be coupled between the inverter
 10 and the engine, and is capable of controlling speed or torque or power level of the engine
 11 402.

12 The DG system 400 may optionally comprise an inverter controller 416 capable of
 13 monitoring the load, and the utility grid in order to perform peak-shaving, net-metering, and
 14 time-of-use metering.

15 The system of Figure 4 is different from that of Figure 3 in structure and function. The
 16 inverter 406 controls the generator 404 output frequency and voltage, which allows
 17 connection of the DG system 400 to the grid and export power to it. Since the frequency of
 18 the generator 404 can be matched to the grid frequency by the inverter 406, there is no need
 19 for a transfer switch to disconnect the generator 404 when the DG system 400 is connected to
 20 the grid. A transfer switch can be very expensive to purchase and install and may be a source
 21 of maintenance issues. Another advantage of the present invention, is that since the engine

402 and generator 404 do not need to be electrically disconnected from the grid, they can run permanently and take over the load very rapidly, should the grid fail. As a consequence, and in contrast to the prior art shown in Figure 3, a smaller battery is needed for load-leveling. It is, therefore, also conceivable to replace the battery with a bank of ultracapacitors; the advantage of ultracapacitors being that they are maintenance free, have a long life cycle, and do not require a sophisticated state of charge management. An ultracapacitor, or “super-capacitor,” stores energy electrostatically by polarizing the electrolytic solution. Though it is an electrochemical device (also known as an electrochemical double-layer capacitor), there are no chemical reactions involved in its energy storage mechanism. This mechanism is highly reversible, allowing the ultracapacitor to be charged and discharged hundreds of thousands of times. An ultracapacitor may be viewed as two non-reactive porous plates suspended within an electrolyte, with a voltage applied across the plates. The applied potential on the positive plate attracts the negative ions in the electrolyte, while the potential on the negative plate attracts the positive ions. This effectively creates two layers of capacitive storage, one where the charges are separated at the positive plate, and another at the negative plate. Ultracapacitors are available from Maxwell Technologies, Inc.

The inverter 406 is preferably a PWM— switched design, which may require an output filter 412 to smooth its voltage. The output filter 412 also provides impedance to allow phase adjustment to achieve required power factor when exporting power to the grid. A filter 512 alternatively may be placed at the output of the DG system, as shown in Figure 5. When the grid is powering the loads, the generator 404 may need to free-spin synchronously in order

1 not to load the system. A clutch between the engine and generator may then be necessary to
2 keep the engine from having to turn. The generator windings may be in wye or delta
3 configuration, or could be switched from wye for starting to delta for running. Details of the
4 generator winding is disclosed in copending U.S. patent application serial No. 09/772,820
5 entitled "Electromechanically Controlled Changeover Switch" and is incorporated herein by
6 reference in its entirety.

7 The present invention can condition power from the grid, provide backup power in the
8 event the grid power fails, and export excess power to the grid without the costly, inefficient
9 AC-DC-AC process of generating, then rectifying, and then reinverting power, without the
10 added expense of a transfer switch, and with a smaller energy storage device. The present
11 invention is more efficient, more flexible, less expensive, smaller and lighter.

12 The engine controller 414 may be coupled to the inverter 406 or inverter controller 416
13 via an analog or digital link. For example, the link may be a serial link, such as a Controller
14 Area Network (CAN). The engine controller 414 may be used to manage the start up, cool
15 down, and fault detection of the engine 402. Further, the engine controller 414 may be used
16 to operate the engine 402 at a specified speed, torque, or power level. The specified
17 operation point may be chosen to maximize efficiency or minimize reaction time depending
18 on the application. The run, stop or operation point value of the engine controller 414 may
19 be sent from the inverter 406 or the inverter controller 416 to the engine controller 414.
20 Alternatively, the engine controller 414 may determine the optimum speed or torque
21 autonomously.

1 It should be understood that, while the present invention has been described in detail
2 herein, the invention can be embodied otherwise without departing from the principles
3 thereof, and such other embodiments are meant to come within the scope of the present
4 invention as defined in the following claim(s).

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